

Effective Strategies

3

There are six general strategies that public libraries can use when designing services for people with special needs. The strategies were developed in response to the three major public library use barriers identified by Wisconsin librarians and social service agency personnel during a 1998 special needs planning conference:

- Inadequate access including physical barriers to a public library building and geographic, neighborhood, and transportation barriers in getting to a public library.
- Knowledge, culture, and climate within the community and inside the library. Outside the library, barriers include lack of familiarity with library services, limited language and literacy skills, attitudes about library use, competing demands, and inadequate emphasis on agency cooperation. Inside the library, barriers may include unwelcoming and uninformed staff and patron attitudes, inflexible library policies, little inclusion of persons with special needs in planning, and a perception that special needs services are expendable.
- Lack of appropriate resources including materials, programs, services, equipment, technology, and staff time.

Public libraries can use the following six general strategies to overcome the barriers.

1. Include adults with special needs and their families and advocates in planning, implementing, and evaluating public library services.
2. Welcome adults with special needs and their families and advocates to the public library in a responsive, sensitive, and appropriate manner.
3. Offer a diverse range of resources, services, and programs that are relevant to the lives of adults with special needs and their families and advocates.
4. Collaborate with community agencies to provide the best possible services to adults with special needs and their families and advocates.
5. Ensure that public library collections, services, and buildings are fully accessible and inviting to adults with special needs and their families and advocates.
6. Market public library services, collections, and programs to adults with special needs, their families and advocates, and the community.

Tables 3.1–3.6 outline a variety of ways public libraries can implement these strategies. They also list contributions that public library systems and the DLTCL can make toward supporting public libraries and improving service to special needs populations. Programs work best that take all six strategies into consideration. Choose the elements that work best for the community and the library's resources and past history in serving special needs populations. This information is adapted from *Public Library Services for Youth with Special Needs: A Plan for Wisconsin* (DeUsabel and Swanson 1999). Although that publication is focused on youth, many of the same ideas apply to library programs for adults as well. The tables offer general service ideas; more specific approaches and resources can be found in later chapters on each special need group.

TABLE 3.1 **Strategy #1: Plan**

Include adults with special needs (ASN) and their families and advocates in planning, implementing, and evaluating public library services.

Public Libraries	Systems	DLTCL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries identify where ASN live in their communities. Public libraries identify community services and programs for ASN. Public libraries develop plans that include ASN as a customer group. Public libraries include ASN in library planning. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite ASN to be part of advisory boards and to serve as trustees. Include ASN advocates as part of library planning. Consult with advocacy groups to recruit ASN or their caregivers as participants in library planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems designate a staff person to work with member libraries on ASN. Special needs consultant attends DLTCL's annual meeting and assists with state planning efforts. Systems gather and share demographic and other information about ASN and community services for them in the system area. Systems conduct workshops on planning services to ASN. Systems consider the needs of ASN in their planning. Systems address special needs services in their long-range plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLTCL funds and maintains a consultant position that works with systems on services for ASN. DLTCL offers support and resources to public libraries and systems in planning for library services to ASN. DLTCL has annual meetings for special needs consultants. DLTCL disseminates demographic data regarding ASN. DLTCL distributes information on planning services to ASN. DLTCL cooperates with other state level organizations and agencies that work with ASN. DLTCL includes librarians who work with ASN on division committees. DLTCL annually reviews the long-range plan for library services to ASN. DLTCL advocates for adequate funding for library programs for ASN. DLTCL provides guidance in the use of the public library standards regarding ASN.

TABLE 3.2 **Strategy #2: Train Staff**

Welcome adults with special needs (ASN) and their families and advocates to the public library in a responsive, sensitive, and appropriate manner.

Public Libraries	Systems	DLTCL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries offer diversity and ability awareness training to all staff on a regular basis. Include practical service tips for ASN. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule ASN as a topic for at least one staff meeting per year. Include trustees in diversity and ability awareness training. Provide training for staff and the public on using library assistive devices. Offer opportunities to attend nonlibrary workshops (e.g., literacy). Provide opportunities for signing and other language training. Schedule ASN and local providers of diversity and ability awareness training to talk to library staff. Public library policies are written and regularly reviewed to ensure that they welcome library use by ASN. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff regularly about library policies. Build flexibility into application of library policies affecting ASN. Have policies reviewed by ASN or their advocates. Public libraries include ASN in employment and volunteer opportunities. Public libraries offer programs about the cultures and history of groups in their communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems offer diversity and ability awareness training workshops and inform their members about other training opportunities. Systems identify and distribute information about regional and statewide providers of diversity and ability awareness training. Systems offer opportunities for staff to attend nonlibrary workshops. Systems assist libraries in identifying employment and volunteer opportunities for ASN. Systems offer workshops and technical assistance to their members in developing policies that welcome ASN. Systems cooperate with the DLTCL in collecting information on the status of special needs issues and disseminate the information to their member libraries. Systems showcase adaptive equipment and model use of various adaptive technologies at system meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLTCL cooperates with systems in offering regional diversity and ability awareness workshops. DLTCL offers support and resources to public libraries and systems in staff training. DLTCL creates a Web page that includes a potential speakers' list for various areas of special needs. DLTCL identifies and distributes information about regional and statewide providers of diversity and ability awareness training and informs systems about awareness training opportunities. DLTCL surveys systems and libraries on current status of various services and issues related to ASN and disseminates information to the systems. DLTCL showcases examples of adaptive technologies at meetings and training sessions.

TABLE 3.3 **Strategy #3: Diversify Collections and Services**

Offer a diverse range of resources, services, and programs that are relevant to the lives of adults with special needs (ASN) and their families and advocates.

Public Libraries	Systems	DLTCL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries develop and maintain, or provide access to, up-to-date collections for and about ASN. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include special needs of adults in collection and development policies. Weed and update collections. Respond to community need for materials in foreign languages and alternative formats. Own or have access to adaptive equipment. Refer eligible users to the Wisconsin Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Public libraries provide access for ASN to library resources and programs through technology. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop accessible Web sites with links to resources for ASN. Provide assistive technology where needed to ensure access to electronic resources. Public libraries design programs that are responsive and accessible to ASN. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide and publicize the library's accommodations. Involve ASN and agency staff in program planning and production. Use appropriate methods and media to reach ASN. Schedule programs at convenient times and places. Public libraries seek supplemental revenue sources for special needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems provide workshops and in-services on materials, programming, resources, and technology related to ASN. Systems ensure that member libraries are knowledgeable about adaptive technology. Systems ensure accessibility to resources for ASN when addressing systemwide technology projects. Systems help libraries develop accessible Web sites. Systems facilitate purchasing materials and equipment for their member libraries. Systems identify supplemental funding sources for services to ASN. Systems assist libraries in writing grants to benefit ASN. Systems write grants to serve ASN. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLTCL offers support and resources to public libraries and systems in providing services and programs for ASN. DLTCL provides information and workshops about services, resources, and technology for ASN. DLTCL ensures accessibility to resources for ASN when addressing statewide technology. DLTCL identifies and publicizes funding sources for services to ASN.

TABLE 3.4 **Strategy #4: Collaborate**

Collaborate with community agencies to provide the best possible services to adults with special needs (ASN) and their families and advocates.

Public Libraries	Systems	DLTCL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries allocate staff time to identify and to work with community groups, agencies, organizations, and networks that serve ASN. Public libraries partner with community agencies in joint ventures, including sharing resources and cosponsoring programs. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide library space for agency meetings and activities. Encourage groups to set up displays in the library. Provide library brochures, bookmarks, and bibliographies to agencies. Seek agency suggestions regarding library resources for their clients. Partner in grant applications. Invite agency staff to library workshops. Offer library tours for agency staff and clients. Contribute articles to agency newsletters. Public libraries are a source for information about agencies. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a public bulletin board for community notices. Maintain a Web site that provides links to community resources for ASN. Publicize agency events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems gather and share with their members information on regional and county agencies serving ASN. Systems gather and share with their members information on residential facilities for ASN (e.g., nursing homes, correctional facilities, group homes for adults with developmental disabilities). Systems inform area agencies that work with ASN about library services for them. Systems provide continuing education opportunities that bring together libraries and community agencies that serve ASN, including library staff in residential facilities and institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLTCL offers support and resources to public libraries and systems in developing partnerships with community groups, agencies, organizations, and networks that work with ASN. DLTCL disseminates information about library services to agencies and organizations that work with ASN. DLTCL cooperates with other state organizations in keeping libraries informed on legislative issues affecting ASN. DLTCL collaborates with other library organizations in advocating for library service to ASN and in educating public officials about the library mission to serve ASN. DLTCL provides continuing education opportunities that bring together libraries and community agencies that serve ASN.

TABLE 3.5 **Strategy #5: Ensure Accessibility**

Ensure that public library collections, services, and buildings are fully accessible and inviting to adults with special needs (ASN) and their families and advocates.

Public Libraries	Systems	DLTCL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries provide services when and where ASN and their families can best use them. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop outreach policies that are responsive to ASN. Offer on-site collections of materials at agencies where ASN are served. Provide access to the library through bookmobiles, vans, and outlets at neighborhood sites. Visit sites such as nursing homes, jails, domestic abuse shelters, low-rent housing units, adult day-care centers and residential facilities for ASN. Offer services to ASN who have trouble leaving their homes. Public libraries work with government agencies and local advocacy groups to ensure access for ASN to library facilities and services. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange for provision of bus passes. Collaborate with other agencies to provide transportation. Public libraries design, remodel, build, and maintain facilities that are accessible and inviting to ASN. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine library buildings annually. Develop a plan to eliminate barriers. Identify and work to reduce neighborhood barriers to library access (e.g., safety issues, automobile traffic, curb cuts in sidewalks). Public libraries write, regularly review, and implement plans to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems provide information and workshops on outreach programs. Systems provide support and technical assistance to help their members in developing fully accessible collections, services, and buildings, including meeting the requirements of the ADA. Systems routinely model the use of assistive technology at their meetings and trainings. Systems develop accommodation availability statements for their meeting and training notices and routinely place these statements on publicity items created by them for member libraries. Systems model universal design use on all their Web pages and ensure that all Web pages created for libraries are accessible. Systems ensure that all training sessions and meetings are held in accessible locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLTCL provides information and workshops on outreach programs. DLTCL offers support and technical assistance to public libraries and systems in developing fully accessible collections, services, and buildings, including meeting the requirements of the ADA. DLTCL conducts a statewide library accessibility survey and disseminates the results. DLTCL models accommodation availability statements on its meeting and training notices. DLTCL models universal design on all its Web pages. DLTCL models various assistive technologies at its meetings and trainings. DLTCL ensures that all training sessions and meetings are held in accessible locations.

TABLE 3.6 **Strategy #6: Market Services and Materials****Market public library services, collections, and programs to adults with special needs (ASN), their families and advocates, and the community.**

Public Libraries	Systems	DLTCL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries work with local agencies and media to publicize library services for ASN. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform trustees regularly about ASN services. Encourage word-of-mouth publicity of services. Keep local, county, and state officials informed. Include ASN in any library public information plan. Identify and use alternative media sources (e.g., ethnic and support group publications). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries use a variety of methods to reach adults with special needs. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer library tour in other languages. Offer printed information in alternative formats. Routinely use large print for information of interest to seniors. Use portable displays of books and materials at agencies and other locations that serve ASN. Develop targeted library public service announcements and press releases for ASN. Use nonprint promotional media such as cable television, billboards, and ethnically oriented radio. Cite availability of assistive technology in library promotional materials. Attend meetings of agencies that work with ASN. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries develop a welcoming atmosphere toward ASN and make it a top staff priority. <p><i>Possible activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt and promote policies and procedures that are responsive to the needs of ASN. Invite agencies and support groups to meet at the library. Display pictures that include people of color and people who have disabilities. Ensure availability of assistive technology. Cultivate a multilingual staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public libraries allocate staff time and funds to market library services to ASN. Libraries use appropriate in-house marketing for adaptive technologies and services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems offer staff training and technical advice in developing and implementing public information plans that include ASN. Systems produce public information materials for their members. Systems promote system-owned and other special needs collections and assistive technology. Systems include information and updates in their publications about special needs. Systems share examples of successful ASN marketing efforts with member libraries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLTCL offers support and resources to public libraries and systems in marketing library services to ASN. DLTCL cooperates with library and other organizations in the promotion of library services to ASN. DLTCL incorporates ideas on how to reach and serve adults with special needs in DLTCL publications (e.g., <i>Channel</i> and monthly postings for special needs consultants). DLTCL shares information on state agencies and other organizations working with ASN. DLTCL shares information on library services to ASN with state agencies and other organizations, through print and electronic media and by providing workshops. DLTCL shares examples of successful marketing efforts with systems.

Reference

DeUsabel, Frances, and Coral Swanson. 1999. *Public Library Services for Youth with Special Needs: A Plan for Wisconsin*. Madison: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning, Public Library Development.